

GUNNISON GORGE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

WILDERNESS HIKES



Wilderness Areas are designated by Congress to specifically protect landscapes with significant natural and cultural value and offer opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Exploring the Gorge is like traveling through time; the geologic formations surrounding you span nearly 2 billion years, from sculptural sandstone features at the rim to rugged pre-Cambrian basement rock cliffs. Human occupation history in the canyon dates back at least 13,000 years to when Native American groups began inhabiting the Eagle Rock Shelter, one of the oldest archaeological sites in North America. Gold, mica, and uranium brought prospectors and miners to the Gorge throughout the 20th century. The Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Act of 1999 established the NCA and Wilderness Area we enjoy today. Several wilderness trailheads provide access to the Gunnison River, which holds a Gold Medal Trout Fishery designation from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. A challenging class III/IV set of rapids attract boaters to this section of the Gunnison from all over the world. A wide variety of wildlife call the Gorge home, including mule deer, elk, mountain lions, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, osprey, and eagles. Please familiarize yourself with wilderness regulations and follow Leave No Trace principles while recreating in this special landscape so that it continues to be unimpaired for future use and enjoyment. For more information, see the BLM's [brochure](#).

◇ Wilderness Trailheads: Be sure to sign the register and fill out an envelope for self-issued permits for wilderness use at the self-serve fee station. Children under 16 may enter for free.

- ❖ Day use: \$3 per person
- ❖ Camping: \$10 per person for one night; \$15 per person for two nights (max. stay)
- ❖ Annual Day-Use Pass: \$15 per person per year. Please note this is **not the same** as a National Parks pass.

◇ Group Size: Regardless of activity, group size in the wilderness area is limited to 12 people.

◇ Camping: Several trails reach campsites along the Gunnison River. These campsites are first-come, first-serve and can be reserved at the trailhead registers.

- ❖ All human waste must be packed out.
- ❖ Wood fires are not permitted; stoves, grills, and/or fire pans with charcoal are required. Coals and ashes must be packed out

◇ Pets: Animals are permitted in the Wilderness Area, but must be kept under visible, audible, or physical controls at all times.

Symbology:

 Hiking trail	 Picnic tables and shade structure(s) at trailhead
 Horse-friendly trail	 Campsites at trailhead
 Bathroom at trailhead	 Self-serve fee station at trailhead

Chukar Trail ◇ 1.1 miles one way, 560 ft drop



If you plan to float the wilderness portion of the Gunnison River through the Gunnison Gorge, Chukar Trail will be your access point. The trail is short but steep, so many people choose to use a pack animal service to help with boating equipment. There are four campsites at the trailhead, plus limited hiker camps at the river. There is an additional toilet at the end of the trail. The trail is heavily used in summer, especially during the Stonefly hatch in late May/early June when anglers from around the world come to fish the Gunnison.

Driving Directions:

1. From Olathe, take Falcon Rd east into Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, where the road becomes Peach Valley Road
 2. Travel 0.25 miles past Peach Valley OHV Staging Area and turn right on Chukar Road
 3. Follow Chukar Road for 7 miles to the recreation site.
- Chukar Road begins as a 2WD gravel road, but the last half is high clearance 4WD. The road is impassable when wet.

Bobcat Trail ◇ 1 mile one way, 800 ft drop



This trail begins at a moderate slope but leads to a steep descent in the last 0.5 mile which might require basic rock-climbing techniques (but no extra equipment). The trail reaches the Gunnison River and two hiker camps. It is impassable for horses and not recommended for dogs due to the steep climb at the end.

Driving Directions:

1. From Olathe, take Falcon Rd east into Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, where the road becomes Peach Valley Road
 2. Travel 2.75 miles north past Peach Valley OHV Staging Area and turn right on Bobcat Road
 3. Follow Bobcat Road for 2 miles to the trailhead
- 4WD is recommended on Bobcat Road. The road is impassable when wet.

Bighorn Trail ◇ 1.5 miles one way, 200 ft drop (north to south)



This mellow, horse-friendly trail offers spectacular river views. Combine with Redrocks-Nighthorse Trail (a non-wilderness, shared-use trail) to form a 3.7-mile loop. You can start at either Bobcat or Duncan Trailheads, but begin at Duncan to get expansive views of the Grand Mesa and the Ute Fault on your way back. Bighorn trail is flanked by excellent examples of biological soil crust, so be sure to watch your step!

- See driving directions for either Duncan or Bobcat Trailheads.

Duncan Trail ◇ 1.5 miles one way, 840 ft drop



Duncan Trail is a rugged wilderness route to the Gunnison River, popular for fishing access. The trail winds along carved sandstone before descending through vast geologic time into the Gorge. The last 0.5 mile is very steep with loose scree. The trail picks back up along the left side at the bottom of this scree slope, then requires another steep descent to reach the river and three hiker camps. Horses are not recommended on this trail if you intend to reach the river.

Driving Directions:

1. From Olathe, take Falcon Rd east into Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, where the road becomes Peach Valley Road
 2. Travel 4 miles north past Peach Valley OHV Staging Area and turn right on Duncan Road
 3. Follow Duncan for 2 miles to the trailhead
- 4WD is recommended on Duncan Road. The road is impassable when wet.

Ute Trail ◇ 3.5 miles one way, 1200 ft drop



This well-developed trail has an overall gradual slope with one steep switchback section. Amazing vistas of the river, unique geologic formations, and wildlife viewing opportunities over the Gorge make it well worth the strain. The trail reaches four hiker camps along the river. In the summer, you'll see a temporary BLM ranger teepee.

Driving Directions: You can take either Falcon Road or Carnation Road to enter the NCA; Ute Road is closer to the Carnation Entrance.

1. Follow Carnation Road until it reaches 6200 Road and turn left
 2. Take 6200 Road for 3.8 miles then turn left on Peach Valley Road
 3. Travel 0.4 miles and turn right onto Ute Road. Make sure to stay on the public road through a short segment of private land.
 4. Follow Ute Road for 2.5 miles to the trailhead. Parking for horse trailers is available on a rise 0.5 miles before the trailhead.
- Ute Road is high clearance 4WD and impassable when wet.

***North Fork to Smith Fork** ◇ 4 miles one way, 200 ft climb



*This trail does not begin in the Wilderness Area but does enter it. Stretching from the North Fork to the Smith Fork of the Gunnison, this trail provides excellent Gold Medal fishing access. Further upstream, the trail reaches three hiker/boater camps. This section of river is especially valuable for fishing during runoff season from the North Fork, which runs cloudy.

Driving Directions:

1. Take Pleasure Park Road south from Highway 92
2. Parking is available at Gunnison Forks Recreation Site.
 - Trail access from Gunnison Forks requires crossing the North Fork of the Gunnison. If you need a ferry, contact Gunnison River Pleasure Park for information.
 - Be aware of water levels when planning your visit.

***West River Trail** ◇ 2.5 miles one way, 200 ft climb



*This trail also begins outside of the Wilderness Area. The trail runs parallel to North Fork to Smith Fork Trail on the other side of the Gunnison. This section of river is especially valuable for fishing during runoff season from the North Fork, which runs cloudy.

Driving Directions:

1. From Highway 92 or 2200 Road in Delta County, take H75 Road east for 3 miles
2. Pass the parking lot with restrooms and continue to the top of the hill. At the five-way intersection, take a slight right onto South River Road.
3. Follow South River Road for 5 miles to West River Trailhead.
 - The majority of South River Road is dirt/gravel and suitable for high clearance 2WD, but the last segment may require 4WD. The road is impassable when wet.

East Gorge Trail ◇ 2.2 miles one way, 1000 ft drop ◇ Seasonally **closed** to motorized & mechanized modes of travel **December 1st to May 15th**



This seldom-used wilderness trail provides a unique opportunity for solitude and—once in the canyon—primitive, unconfined recreation. The trail is faint, traveled as much by elk as it is by humans. After 2.2 miles the trail joins the Smith Fork Trail, an old 2-track route that is now a wilderness trail. The Smith Fork Trail stays above the rim of the inner Gorge. If you follow the trail downcanyon, it ends at Smith Fork Creek. It is very important to come prepared with adequate supplies and route-finding skills if you intend to explore the wilderness. There is no water along this route, so carry all that you will need. There is no good river access from this route, but there are some amazing views of the river from the inner rim. This is an in-and-out route and does not have a loop option.

The best seasons to explore this trail are spring and fall; Black Ridge Road is seasonally closed to motorized and mechanized modes of travel from December 1st to May 15th to protect Gunnison Sage Grouse and big game winter habitat. In the summer, there is limited shade.

Although the trail is open to **horses**, it is highly recommended you scout the trail to assess whether it is suitable for your animal(s). Other than the corral location mentioned to the right, there are few places to park or turn around a trailer along the road.

Driving Directions:

Use the “Get Here” feature on COTREX for Google Maps directions, which get you as far as Black Ridge Road. Driving into Crawford, turn onto Fruitland Mesa Road, across from the library. Stay on Fruitland Mesa for about 10 miles (keep an eye on the road signs, as it does turn/split from other county roads). Turn left on B25 Road and take it for 1 mile, then make a slight right onto 3350 Road. In 0.3 miles make a left onto B50 Road and take it for 1.3 miles. Black Ridge Road will be on your left. It is an inconspicuous road so look for the fence next to the road where a brown BLM fiberglass marker is located. The road is initially flanked by private property, so please be respectful and stay on Black Ridge Road. After about ¼ mile you will see a handful of signs indicating you are entering public lands.

Black Ridge Road is dirt/gravel and is best driven with a high clearance vehicle. Follow the brown fiberglass markers with arrows marking Black Ridge Road. After 5.75 miles on Black Ridge Road make a left turn at the arrow pointing to East Gorge Trail. You will pass an old wooden corral on your right shortly before reaching the trailhead—this is a good place for horse trailer parking. The road continues a short distance past the trailhead and reaches an overlook, but there is more space to turn your vehicle around near the trailhead sign. The distance from the sign to the overlook is easily walkable. To the left of the sign you will see gabions (rock-filled wire baskets) indicating where the trail follows the rim before descending below the canyon rim.